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The absence of firm knowledge about the nonintellectual activities of college students requires that care be taken about the information sources accepted and the way in which such information is phrased. A longitudinal study, conducted on the University of Wisconsin Madison campus on the nonintellectual factors in academic success, seeks to discover a broad array of information on self-identified personality characteristics, values, work orientation, expectation for the future, and experience and background. Some information, taken from the study, is presented. The author asserts that administrators should consider drug use on campus in terms of its place among other problems. (PS)

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National Association of Student Personnel Administrators
Drug Education Project (1966-67)
Background Papers

SOME PROBLEMS IN THE STUDY OF DRUG USE AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS[1]

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The problem of the study of drug use on the campus is not intrinsically different from the study of many other things on the campus. As always, we must ask why we are interested in the study, what we want to know. For example, if we view drugs on the campus as a 'social problem' which should be studied, we will have quite a number of questions that interest us. What is the extent of drug use on campus? What do we mean by 'drug,' by 'use'? Who uses drugs? What are the consequences of the drug use? How can use be affected, presumably for control? What factors make for the social problem? What is the role of public reaction? What is the administrative role in the definition of the social problem? How do parents influence interpretation of events?

As is clear in the comments of many others, some requirements for proper study remain as relative constants. We must distinguish clearly, to be sure, what we mean by a "narcotic" and what we mean when we use the broader term "drug." But equally, we must be clear in the specification of meaning at other levels. I shall draw some examples from our experience at the University of Wisconsin, and the first of these deals with the problem of communication with the students on the campus itself. Unfortunately, not all the students understand us when we start talking about the student culture. If you ask them whether they have used pep pills, many of them think you want to know about pills to make you feel physically better, like molasses and sulphur or something for 'tired blood'. The simplest and most immediate point is that we should not assume information we are seeking. If we want to know something about the student culture, possibly we should not have too strong conceptions about what it is. This platitude is easily stated but is not commonly adhered to. In the common journalistic materials on drug use on campus, and indeed in the more professional literature, there is a remarkable lack of specificity about the extent and location of the segment of the population that is being referred to in discussions of drug use. How large, to turn the question backwards, is the segment of the student population that is relatively ignorant of the 'student culture'? For that matter, on how many campuses is there anything corresponding to a student culture as we describe one for the University of Wisconsin or

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Berkeley? Surely it is a small proportion of the 2,500 institutions of higher learning where such things as drug use on the campus are problems, real or imagined. But this is a question of empirical fact on which we apparently have little or no information.

In the absence of firm knowledge, we must be extremely careful what sources of information we accept, and we must constantly be concerned with the way in which the information is phrased. To illustrate the interpretation of facts in this sense, let me remind you of a recent report emanating from the Harvard-Radcliffe axis (that disrupter of the peace) on the prevalence of premarital sexual intercourse among students. We might question the facts themselves, since they came from a psychiatrist in the clinic there, but this is not the point here. In the reaction to the 'facts' a number of positions were stated, some based on other 'facts'. One such position, presented in an editorial of the student newspsper, included the statement that premarital sex was sufficiently prevalent among students as to be part of the mores. Conceivably the prevalence may be great among the students at the University of Wisconsin, but the data were not produced and the peculiarity of the statement can be immediately noted by making explicit the implied question: Does this now mean that those who do not are immoral? In our willingness to have tolerance for alternatives, we may overstate the case for the alternatives quickly, misinterpreting the facts, if indeed they are facts.

I must join the ranks of those who confess ignorance about the extent or consequences of drug use. I would like at the same time to suggest that there is some relevant research being conducted. You have already heard mention of the studies being conducted by Dean Manheimer and Ira Cisin. These are national studies. I am also involved in such a national study of quite different scope. But let me mention rather than these the work we are doing on the University of Wisconsin Madison campus.

Sometime ago we planned a rather large study of college student values. The general theme of the study is the nonintellectual factors in academic success. You can appreciate immediately that to study the nonintellectual factors one must have access to pretty good knowledge of the intellectual factors, and on this score we were pretty well set at the University of Wisconsin. What could be included in the study was not limited by our imagination, which seems to be insufficiently bounded, even without the help of drugs to extend our creativity or expand our consciousness. Rather, the limits to the multitude of questions we wished answered were set by the anticipated tolerance of the students. Our gauge and strategies were reasonably well chosen, and we ended up with 96 per cent of students completing usable forms before arrival on the campus, providing us with a broad array of information on self-identified personality characteristics, values, work orientation, expectations for the future, and experience and background. I must remark immediately than in forms sent to them at their homes we did not dare ask certain kinds of questions that might be interpreted as overly personal, but we did ask about religion, race, and such things as how they felt about premarital intercourse. We did not think it relevant to ask if they had used 'pot' or LSD, and I will mention why in a few minutes.

Since this is designed as a longitudinal study, we can follow the

course of development of the students, and we can do associational studies of factors related to success in college or with any other behavior or event displayed subsequently.

Let me explain why we did not ask about 'pot.' First of all, it was not quite as pressing a topic three years ago. Second, we did not have any indication that the incidence or prevalence would be more than trivial in the Wisconsin communities from which the majority of our students is drawn. Third, we operate under the naive assumption, seemingly not seriously contradicted, that the youngsters coming to college were from the most favored and respectable segment of the population, in which exposure to such a thing as 'pot' might not be common.

This third prejudice about the characteristics of the youngsters arriving for higher education is not unreasonable in the light of known selective procedures and studies of aspirations. In fact, some persons who are not 'with it' might even make the rash suggestion that the 'cream of American youth' goes to college. Obviously, this is an exaggeration, but in a dozen different ways it could be said that those who are going to college have characteristics that are viewed as favorable in society. For example, they are probably less likely to have been in trouble with the law, to have smoked, drunk, or used drugs, or to be completely circular, to be drop-outs. You will note that I am again striking at the problem of defining facts and putting them in perspective.

We are told by many that these are times of great changes in the youth of society, but the evidence is really quite lacking. For example, in spite of the effects some presume to have resulted from the dissemination of the Kinsey reports and their accompanying literature, I am not convinced that great shifts in the sex morality, judged on performance, have occured. Possibly something has changed with regard to attitudes of tolerance for the behavior of others, but I am not sure I know what the historical changes are. Let me give you a few figures that you may find interesting.

In our class of '68 at the University of Wisconsin, in the sophomore year, second semester, it may be of some interest for us to see the attitudes on an item like: "Women should not have sexual intercourse before they marry." Fifty per cent of males and sixty per cent of females agree with this statement. Since the University of Wisconsin is not exactly known as a place of unliberal tradition or of campus squares, this figure might be startling. A large proportion of the student population at the sophomore year agrees with that statement.

Now, for fun, we built in a fair number of devices to get at information we could not reach directly. Despite the fact that we were not impressed by the relevance of the question of personal drug use, we have to live with the problem of having reasonably continuous access to data. So, we thought it strategic to build into our studies a few gimmicks. With the class of '69 we initiated an overlapping study. As in the first we did not get to ask all the questions on health, smoking behavior, aspirations, and a few other areas, that we wanted. At the follow-up in the second semester of the freshman year, the device used included a question as follows:

> Newspapers and magazines have frequently featured stories about problems on the campus. Many of these are based on very limited information and on particular incidents that come to light. In the following, think of five specific persons of your own sex you know best, know most about, and answer the questions below about them. Think of five specific persons, preferably freshmen like yourself. Do not include yourself in the five. If in doubt about a person or an item, assume it was not done.

This was developed as one source of information on the extent of certain classes of behavior. Does it have validity? Maybe. Let's look at some of the data. We asked the question had the individual used tranquilizers. Among males, 1.9% reported occasional or more frequent use for themselves. Taking the weighted average of responses which reported use among friends, the figure is 6.0%. To the question of whether one has friends who got drunk, the weighted statistic for the males is 25.7%. Interestingly, the sum of percentages of self reports of persons who said they drank beer regularly or drank hard liquor regularly was 26.0%. The beer figure was 23.9% which is close enough to be impressive.

Alas, I must now illustrate the point that good research with replications is a nuisance. We could have stopped there and have been ahead of the game. The next question would be: Then, by the indirect procedure, what percentage of friends smoked 'pot' or marihuana? The weighted mean of the freshman in the second semester was less than 3.5%. For LSD it was the same figure.

Now let us look at the female data, the replication. By self report 5.2% indicated occasional or more frequent use of tranquilizers, but the weighted average of friends yielded a percentage of 10.5. With regard to drinking, 11.3% of the females reported regular beer drinking and an additional 1.2% regular hard liquor drinking. But the percentage of drunkenness reported is only 4.8% among friends. Obviously, either the girls assess their drinking differently, report it differently, or react to it differently. Since the definitions of regular drinking and drunkenness are not in any way identical, the inconsistencies may be viewed as reasonable in a tentative way. We will be getting other data. But now, let us look at the data for 'pot' and marihuana, which is 3.3% reported as the weighted percentage for friends. The LSD figure is only 1.2%. Are these the kinds of things that girls are likely to talk to each other about? You can see the problem with our indirect approach for some of these data.

Let me tantalize you a bit with a few more items. Obviously girls do not brag about their sexual conquests, so we are not amazed by a figure of only 7.5% for premarital intercourse reported for friends. Or is this a reasonable figure for such a progressive institution? Let us at least look at the figures for males who, let us say, are less likely to keep their activities of this nature secret and may, in fact, sometimes be prone to exaggerate. For the males, the weighted figure is 30 per cent.

Of course, many things can be said about the figures given, and we do not have time to argue them here. I will be glad to answer some questions, but let me go on to a few more items of interest, the most obvious of which is that the use of hard liquor is best predicted by the use of beer, and the use of these is then best predicted by smoking. We will have to wait a while for the rest of the data, but we would hypothesize that these will be related to some drug use as well.

We have said many times that college students should not be compared directly to the population at large. The period of life involved is an interesting one from the point of view of study, as it marks for many the period of transition from adolescent to adult. This transition is highly complex, as has been noted, and the study of drug use, alcohol use, premarital intercourse, and many other such topics is interrelated. It is complicated by the fact that the laws and mores involved are not necessarily rational from the point of view of the parties involved. Alcohol laws are notoriously arbitrary. If we have complex situations with our 18-year-old in Wisconsin, I am sure that where the age limits are higher some aspects of problems must be more similar to the drug use situation than is the case with us.

The problems of values get interwoven with our studies in various ways. I have implied in my presentation an unwillingness to make certain kinds of assumptions, particularly not to accept as facts items so often labeled for which I have found previous lack of correspondence with research experience in other quarters. Possibly more of this attitude would help some deans. I am not sure. I guess it depends on how the facts are translated into social problems. It may be that if any drug use at all is visible, i.e., a case exists that is reported to an agency, there is a cry of alarm that makes the social problem. But if it is the statistics or the numbers that make the social problem, then possibly the deans should look more closely at the numbers. If, for example, a third of 75 deans report having 10 or more youngsters referred or self-referred or self-reported for some drug use, it might not be unreasonable to estimate that for the group as a whole some average figure might be 8 persons per institution. If we were to estimate that institutions average 5,000 students, this would mean that less than one in five hundred is a problem with regard to use of drugs. For some this may be a big figure, for others small. How does it compare with other kinds of problems that come to the attention of deans? For example, what percentage of their students drop out for all reasons? At the University of Wisconsin about 25% are not present in the second year.

I would like to suggest that administrators should consider the place of drug use on a campus in terms of its place among other problems. For example, this is not the era of panty raids, and we really should ask if in some ways the problems do not have some analogy. The seriousness of the problem is not due to the fact that students are introspecting on various issues or acting out dreams, or doing other things of this sort, but the fact that the actions they carry out are of sufficient proportions to come to the attention of authorities. The point is that, as in any other thing in society, what really makes a social problem is the fact that it is <u>social</u>. The behavior involved is of sufficient consequence to come to the attention of others in a way that is noxious and requires control. I think that the same is true with drug

use on the campus, as it is with stealing, cheating, getting drunk, reckless driving, and so forth. The question, then, is one of how important are such things in terms of the way they come to the attention of the deans. With regard to legal involvement, obviously some direct answers can be stated. With regard to nonlegal involvement, other classes of answers may be appropriate. Among these cases what is the influence of drug use? How large is the proportion of dropouts that can be attributed to drug use? Is drug use a symptom of other classes of problems, or is it a cause? I think there is danger in overemphasizing the factors that make students take drugs in the current context. These factors make students do lots of other things besides.

I am not sure that there is a handbook for deans, but if there is not, there should be. For example, deans very often try to resolve problems that are just none of their business. They have to draw a line between things that should concern the dean and the university or college, matters that are private for the individuals involved, matters that are related to the responsibility and definitions of the community in which the institution exists, and then matters that are the responsibilities of parents.

While it may be important to give attention to all groups that are on campus, there is some fault in systems that give too much attention to those persons who are least likely to succeed. We are always troubled with this in all of our programs of education. Persons who are trouble cases tend to get the most attention. It is constantly a need to balance this attention against other attention that is given on the campus. With something like drug use, people can come to the attention of the administration because they have been in trouble or because they volunteer, wanting attention. I am not sure that I know how to handle the latter group, except to suggest that they go see their ministers or psychiatrists. They are not asking for education; they are asking for attention and I am not sure that it is the proper role of the university or college. The former, on the other hand, need not be handled by deans. Since these are behaviors that involve the student culture to some extent, possibly deans would be wiser to throw some of these onto the responsibility of the student judiciary systems. Let them be their own hatchet men. If the action is considered to be important by the student body in terms of requirement for control, fine. If the dean feels that such control is needed; this would serve and his purpose would be accomplished. If not, then the system would accept that the legal sanctions are sufficient.

I think that the question of rebellion that is involved really ought to be faced more directly. Against whom are these students rebelling? Are they rebelling against the university? Possibly, but only indirectly as the representative of other systems within the society. They are rebelling against it as part of the parental control system, as part of the legal system and as part of the conserver of the mores of society. Deans would be well-advised to try to point out to students when they have the university as an appropriate target and when they do not. In fact, deans could become heroes by showing some leadership in being sympathetic to the problems of the students and suggesting that they go picket the right people.

Finally, I would suggest that problems of this sort, in different ways, have existed all along. They are not new, and they may be judged <u>post hoc</u> to have been fads or peculiar involvements. If we lose sight of this perspective, we can use up tremendous resources and involve enormous amounts of time in a wasted effort.